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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 90 JULY 16TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

The first comment on last week's Supplement came from a Scottish friend of early days whose rich knowledge of life and ripe wisdom makes me attach high value to anything that comes from her pen. This is what she writes:

THE LARGER SETTING OF EARTHLY LIFE

"I am convinced of the vital necessity for a new stress on belief in a world of Divine activity in the universe, beyond our present experience. The thought of this finds expression here and there in literature, and the reasonableness of a far greater emphasis on it in Christian faith can be based on much that is written in the New Testament. Yet, as a practical factor in planning for this life, it does not seem to hold the place that ought to be given to it. Two reasons help to account for this. The one is a fear of the charge of other worldliness. The other is a fear of basing argument and life on what may seem to be mere speculation. This fear would have justification if it were necessary to outline any detailed scheme of activities beyond our human experience. No knowledge of detail is necessary in order to let the realization of this larger whole of experience become a vital influence on the lives of those whose attention it commands.

"Much has been written about the need to come into closer touch with nature; the need to regain a sense of dependence on her and to cease to exploit the earth for speedy returns. Comparatively little stress has been laid on the need for a greater consciousness of the relation between the race and the universe. The sense of man's direct dependence on God has been allowed to fade into the background and much of the effort of serious thought is concentrated on what can be achieved within the confines of the world. The larger view of God's activity in the universe has a direct bearing on plans for immediate reconstruction. We constantly hear the words 'prosperity' and 'security' and many people seem willing to accept them as true sign-posts towards an adequate goal, and eager to pay the temporary cost that is thought necessary to attain them. Surely we have to face a much greater cost if any real progress is to be made. It is the cost of facing the fact that neither 'prosperity' nor 'security,' nor both of these together, will give the true opportunity for better conditions of human society or for the development of individual character. If the life of man has vaster possibilities than can be experienced on earth, prosperity with security is an inadequate goal. In criticising this ideal I am not for one moment justifying the poverty and the inequalities in our society nor that utter insecurity which prevents initiative and any rising of the mind and will above the daily demand. But I do maintain that to work for world-wide prosperity and security without considering the need for strenuous endeavour and endurance is to ignore the danger of the situation. The demand that the revelation of God's will in Christ makes is for sacrifice. And sacrifice in some form or other must be present and must be accepted openly and constantly in any proposals for the building of a Christian community.

"There is a very wonderful expression of the incarnation in St. John's Gospel. We are apt to visualise chiefly the words in it that describe Christ's action in the upper room. But if our minds are conscious of activities of God throughout the universe, beyond our conception, the words take on new meaning. 'Jesus knowing that He was come from God, and went to

God, took a towel and girded Himself.' The suggestion comes that because His life on earth was part of so vastly greater an activity beyond, the importance of His acts here rose in significance."

THE JAPANESE DREAM

There is on the surface a considerable resemblance between the outlook and aims of Japan and those of the Axis Powers in Europe. It is important to realise that the Japanese attitude owes nothing to Hitler and Mussolini but is entirely a native growth. It has its roots in the Shinto worship which is the expression of devotion to the Emperor as the embodiment of the highest virtues of the Japanese race, and of a complete dedication of the individual to the service of his country. Possessing this divinely inspired government, it is the mission of Japan to extend its benefits to other peoples. The vocation of Japan in the eyes of the Japanese is to make the world a true family united in loyalty to a single head. The use of force when it is necessary to achieve this high end is a sacred obligation. It may be the duty of one who loves to inflict chastisement. The Japanese point with pride to what they have achieved in Manchukuo as evidence of their beneficent intentions. In the eyes of the Japanese the war in China is not imperial aggression but a high-minded endeavour to establish a new order in Asia. The Japanese attitude, rooted in a strong native tradition, has, of course, been influenced profoundly in recent years by the ambitions and materialism of Western nations. All this is explained more fully in a new volume to be published next month in the C.N-L. Books (Sheldon Press, 1s. 6d.) *Japan in the World Crisis* by C. J. Strank, who was for a number of years a missionary in Japan.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The Supplement this week is a powerful re-enforcement of one of the major points in the preceding one. It points to an urgent task in which immediate action can be taken. The task is one in which most of us can, in one way or another, take a share, knowing that our contribution, however small and seemingly insignificant, is helping in combination with a multitude of similar small contributions, to strengthen the bonds of fellowship and responsibility, of love and trust, which hold a community together. Mr. Cole is a Fellow of University College, Oxford, and Reader in Economics in Oxford University. He is also a Fellow of Nuffield College and Chairman of the Social Reconstruction Survey which is being undertaken by that College. He is the author of many books on social and political questions, and also, in collaboration with his wife, of detective stories.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.

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Supplement to C.N.-L. No. 90

DEMOCRACY FACE TO FACE WITH HUGENESS

By G. D. H. COLE

Men have but a short history of civilised living, and for by far the greater part of that history they have been used to living together in quite small groups. Most of the day-to-day problems they have been called upon to solve collectively have been those of neighbourhood—problems affecting themselves and other persons whom they know as individuals, or at least know about so as to have an insight into their needs and desires. Great States have existed far back in history ; but they have been external forces, acting upon the individual, but not shaped by him or calling upon him to play any conscious part in ordering their affairs. Only quite lately, over a space of time which is insignificant in relation to the whole span of social development, have ordinary men been placed in a position in which they are called upon to take part in decisions which involve the united action of millions and require a capacity for reasoning in generalisations which far transcend the limits of their practical knowledge and personal acquaintance.

It is vital to remember this in laying our plans for the democracy of to-morrow; for it is largely through forgetting it that the democracy of yesterday has gone wrong. Every man has to live through, before or after birth, the entire history of the human race, as well as the history of man's ancestors upon the earth. He comes to citizenship trailing these clouds, not of glory, but of a growth neither glorious nor inglorious in itself, but neutral, and of ever-increasing potentiality for both good and evil. His whole past, the whole past of his ancestors, is in him, alive and ready to be active, though most of it remains under normal conditions below the level of conscious awareness.

The art of living together in organised communities goes far back in history—even beyond the beginnings of man as the creature he is. It is the outgrowth of a primitive gregariousness, as the social psychologists call it ; and men for most of their history have been slowly (though not uninterruptedly) rationalising their ways of living together and developing their capacities towards higher and more differentiated forms of social control. But of late man's capacity to learn has been subjected to an altogether unprecedented strain. Into a world still relatively static in its basic ways of living—though, looking back on it, we can see in it the seeds of all that has happened since—the advanced thinkers in all the classes, led thereto largely by the Protestant conception of a direct and unmediated relation between the individual and God, projected the idea of representative democracy as a means of governing great States. Men, they felt, had shown their fitness to govern themselves in small groups (above all in small groups of dissenters who had to govern themselves because they rejected the discipline of a universal Church); and there seemed no reason why, having achieved so much, they should not go on to govern themselves collectively in greater groups, and take into their hands, by means of representative democracy, the government of the State.

GROWING COMPLEXITY OF SOCIETY

But, over the brief period in men's history during which this experiment in democracy has been made, the material basis of living has been changing at a pace undreamt of by those who preached Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in that dawn when Wordsworth found it blest to be alive. Men found themselves called up to master the art, not of governing the State as it was, but of prescribing for the government of a vast society which changed its basic structure so fast that the magnitude and growing complication of its problems outran hopelessly their capacity to learn the difficult art of collective control. Under the leadership of science, things ran away with men, and the social mind was left groping further and further behind.

Now, when problems become too big for men to understand, their actions cease to be governed by the higher controlling mechanisms of their conscious minds, and the living past of the unconscious resumes its sway. Its processes are radically different from those of the conscious mind, above all in being both amoral and unco-ordinated, so that they do not reject contradiction. Nothing is easier than for this part of man's mind to believe inconsistent things: they do not appear as inconsistent, because there is no active controlling mechanism to relate them one to another.

This fact lies at the very root of the failure of parliamentary democracy. Its weakness has been that it has presented to the ordinary man problems much too remote from his knowledge and experience for him to solve rationally. As he must solve them somehow, he solves them irrationally; for his undermind resumes its sway as soon as his upper mind retires defeated before the magnitude of the task presented to it. This explains not only the weakness and irrationality of parliamentary democracy at its best, but also the ease with which it has been swept aside by dictatorship in one country after another. For dictatorship, in its appeal to the people, is neither more nor less than an unscrupulous and conscious exploitation of the undermind.

Stated in this way, the problem may seem hopeless for those who believe in democracy. I do not wish to deny its difficulty; but its hopelessness I do altogether deny. The task which the democrats of 1789 called upon the ordinary man to shoulder was far harder than they knew; for they could not anticipate the tremendously formidable pace of material change with its constant presentation of new problems long before the old ones had been solved. But it was not, I believe, even so an impossible task : nor is it now. Unhappily, the old democrats, Jacobins and Benthamites alike, made a disastrous mistake in their interpretation of democracy. Their forerunners had wished to strip man naked before God, to throw off all the trappings of Church and sacrament in order to establish a direct and personal relationship between the individual and his Creator. The political democrats set out to strip the individual naked in his relations to the State, regarding all the older social tissue as tainted with aristocratic corruption or privileged monopoly. Their representative democracy was atomistically conceived, in terms of millions of voters each casting his individual vote into a pool which was somehow mystically to boil up into a General Will.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

No such transmutation happened, or could happen. Torn away from his fellows, from the small groups which he and they had been painfully learning to manage, the individual was lost. He could not control the State: it was too big for him. Democracy in the State was a great aspiration; but in practice it was largely a sham.

Not wholly so; for men, though this task was too big for them, set busily to work creating social groups which they could manage democratically, because the decisions

needed in them were such as could be taken on a basis of real collective experience. They built up Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, Friendly Societies, and a host of voluntary associations of every sort and kind; and in these the true spirit of democracy flourished. But the State—Government and Law together—was hostile to these natural growths of the spirit of democracy, and recognised them only grudgingly and perforce. They were commonly regarded as dangerous enemies of a democracy, which was atomistically conceived, whereas they were in truth the embodiments of the democratic spirit in the form in which its realisation was most within men's grasp.

But this vital associative life had also to contend with difficulties arising out of the rapidly changing material basis of social life. The associations had to become larger and to unify organisation over wider and wider fields, in order to face their own problems on an ever-growing scale. Therewith they became less completely democratic, threatening in their turn to develop the same atomistic perversion of democracy which was its ruin in the State. Moreover, these associations, each sectional and serving particular ends, could not express the whole man, or form any adequate substitute for a neighbourhood group through which men could learn the art of citizenship in its more general aspect. The growth of local government did something towards bridging the gulf between the individual and the State; and the growth of political parties with a wide popular membership was a second essay in mediation. But the political party was largely ineffective because the tradition of parliamentary centralism caused it to be rather an instrument organised from the top than a force surging up from below. Parties were not shaped by their members: they set out rather to order their members from above. Nor had the national parties that intimate touch with local government which might have brought them nearer to being instruments for the true democratic formulation of will and opinion from below.

As for local government itself, its democratic qualities are very new—too new to have sunk deeply into men's minds as yet. Only very recently has local government acquired the powers and functions which could enable it to become a vital instrument for the expression of the democratic spirit; and most unfortunately this growth of powers has been accompanied by a tremendously rapid spread of towns which has gone far towards neutralising the development of local democracy. For urban areas have both grown so populous and complex in their problems as to reproduce many of the defects of parliamentary democracy, and have also expanded so much out of relation to the recognised areas of election and administration as to lose their living reality.

THE SPIRIT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD

Our problem, in face of all these formidable difficulties, is simple to state. It is to find democratic ways of living for little men in big societies. For men are little, and their capacity cannot transcend their experience, or grow except by continuous building upon their historic past. They can control great affairs only by acting together in the control of small affairs, and finding, through the experience of neighbourhood, men whom they can entrust with larger decisions than they can take rationally for themselves. Democracy can work in the great State (and *a fortiori* between great States or over Europe or the world) only if each State is made up of a host of little democracies, and rests finally, not on isolated individuals, but on groups small enough to express the spirit of neighbourhood and personal acquaintance.

It is worth while to be bombed or invaded, if only *blitz* or invasion can teach us this lesson. In blitzed cities here, in invaded towns and villages all over Europe, in dictator-ridden Germany, where the amoral unconscious has been invoked as an instru-

ment of the lust for power, men and women are creating new social tissue, drawn together into little groups of neighbours by suffering and oppression and insistent human need for sympathy and collective strength. These little groups are the forces out of which the new Europe must be built, if democracy is to be its moving spirit. They are the nuclei of the new social consciousness on which alone the practical architects of the social order of to-morrow can hope to build a society in which men's higher faculties of love and creative service will have soil to grow.

THE CREATION OF FELLOWSHIP

But to-day these little groups are pitiably isolated and unconscious one of another. Throughout Nazi-ridden Europe, the primary purpose of our propaganda should be to feed these groups with ideas, through the natural leaders who have been thrown up among them, and to make them conscious one of another, even when direct communication between them is impossible. How far our propaganda misses this mark it would take another essay to show. Here it can be said only that our propagandists do not appear even to be aiming at it. More directly relevant to my present purpose is the application of what I have been saying to our home affairs. Those of us who believe in real democracy, and not in its atomistic perversion which threatens us with ruin, must find ways of getting together and of making contact with the chosen leaders of the countless little groups which are learning to practise democratic fellowship under the savage impact of war. Wherever we can, we must live among these groups, learn by sharing in their experience, and bring back lessons which we can apply to the wider tasks of social reconstruction. I know that I am only one of thousands who in this bewildered, devastated world of broken illusions and obsolete formulations of faith or doctrine, are groping for fellowship and for new ideas or formulations, based on the relevant experience of the world of to-day. Such communications are difficult to establish. Travel is difficult: we are all busy with what seem urgent tasks: it is hard for men to meet and talk, and learn by that communion of neighbourhood of which the values often transcend speech.

But the blackout is not absolute. We can reach out one to another through the darkness. What is most urgent now is to give those who have in them the capacity of leading a few the sense that there are others besides themselves busy, each in his own narrow sphere, about the real business of democracy, which is the making of men. Our past affiliations, of party or creed or class, are irrelevant to this task, save as means of making contacts. We, whom luck or experience or intellectual cunning or divine inspiration—call it what you will—has endowed with the inward vision of democracy, must come together with faith and courage to proclaim ourselves the architects of the new society, and to offer what inspiration we may to those fellow-workers, personally unknown to us, who are labouring, consciously or but half-consciously, under stress of blasting experience, in the cause of a democracy which will not desert little men forlorn and alone in a world whose hugeness leaves them shuddering and afraid of the dark.

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